



# 2009: Year in Review

## OPEN LAND MANAGEMENT





# A Letter From The Forest Supervisor

Shawnee National Forest Supervisor with the National Rise to the Future Line Officer Award for his leadership and support in building and sustaining a successful fisheries program.



Do you remember the movie "Groundhog Day?" Generally, the movie portrays a fellow who wakes up to the same events each day. This year seems very similar to last year with the now typical menu of ice, rain,

wind and other events that seem to buffet our part of the world. Consequently we spent much of the year opening trails, roads and recreation areas for use. With the assistance of many volunteer groups and

employees from neighboring forests, we maintained, sometimes more than once, over 250 miles of trail, opened numerous miles of road and brought our developed recreation areas back on line. Thanks to all the volunteers who helped with clean-up operations, not only on the Forest, but throughout southern Illinois.

This year I would like to highlight our work in open lands. While we generally think of land covered by trees when we talk about forests, we have come to understand that not all of the forest is covered by trees. Many valued species, such as the protected Henslow's sparrow, and the non-listed Bob White quail and wild turkey, require these open areas at least during some part of their life cycle. We are working to make certain these species have much needed open land habitat. By way of example, in 2009, with assistance from the National Wild Turkey Federation and Quail Unlimited, over 200 acres of grown up fields were planted to grasses and forbs to improve the habitat for species requiring open lands, while improving access opportunities for many visitors.

This Year-in-Review is filled with examples of successes where employees and partners of all kinds dedicated their time and economic support to improve the conditions and opportunities for everything from plants to people. For example, volunteers donated 13,541 hours of work on the Forest. Your contributions, employees and partners alike, are sincerely appreciated and the conditions and opportunities within the forest are improved due to your dedication and interest.

**Allen Nicholas**

*Shawnee National Forest Supervisor*



Snow and ice damage at Goose Bay

## Awards

■ Cindy Morris was named Region 9 Technical Engineer of the Year for 2008 in recognition of her outstanding skill in project design, development and construction.

■ Monica Neal received a Walking the Talk of Sustainability Award for her Take U.S. for a Ride efforts to establish a com-

muter bus route for Supervisor's Office employees.

■ Chris Peterson received a Revolutionizing Effectiveness and Efficiency Award for the 'Best Little Fire Management Program in Illinois.'



Preparing the tanker.



## More Kids in the Woods

■ Hosted our ninth Fish Tails conservation education program and added two new partners, the Sierra Club – Illinois Chapter and the United Methodist Church of Vienna bringing our total to ten.



Lending a helping hand during Fish Tales.

program, hosted 2,834 students at 35 stations staffed by all natural resource agencies and organizations in the area.

■ We participated in two Fishing Derbies on Illinois' Free Fishing Day with 208 kids participating. Local

■ The 20th annual Stewardship Week, an outstanding environmental education

organizations, merchants and individuals supported the events with supplies, equipment and personnel.

## Sister Forests Give Us a Hand



Hoosier National Forest mule team hauling gravel into wilderness.

After severe weather events the Ottawa, Hoosier and Superior National Forests assisted in clearing up the resulting hazards. The Ottawa's five-member saw team spent eight days on the Shawnee clearing approximately 33 miles of trail. The Hoosier National Forest's saw team cleared about 60 miles of Forest Service designated trails; and their mule team spent two weeks assisting the trail crew by hauling 32 tons of gravel to be used on trail tread in the wilderness. The Superior's saw crew cleared about two miles of wilderness trail using traditional hand tools.

## Safety

■ The Forest hosted its first chainsaw and crosscut saw training in 2009 for volunteer groups, including Shawnee Mountain Bike Association, Camp Ondessonk and Master Trail Steward students.

■ A total of 168,770 hours were worked and 290,069 miles were driven from July 1, 2008 through June 30, 2009 without any time lost.

■ Safety issues addressed this year includes the emergency clean-up of downed and broken limbs on roads and trails after the ice storm and the Derecho (winds in excess of 100 mph).



Working to remove storm damage from trails.



# Revolutionizing Effectiveness and Efficiency

■ With partner University of Illinois Extension (UI-E), we created a strong program that emphasizes teamwork, leadership, partnership, stewardship and education.



Volunteers for Cove Hollow work day.

■ The Shawnee National Forest volunteer program has seen tremendous growth since receiving a \$77,000 Centennial Grant in 2005 that originally funded the Master Trail Steward (MTS). Accomplishments include:

- *A course teaching technical proficiency, theory, history and application of trail management*
- *Six graduates from the first class in 2008/2009 to provide field leadership*
- *Twelve enrollees for the 2009/2010 MTS classes and 8 are on a waiting list*
- *Course being considered for 3 credit hours for SIU-Recreation Dept.*
- *An 8 hour credit course at Shawnee Community College*
- *Provides Continuing Education Units for teachers, college credit for students, as an independent study course through SIU-Department of Health, Education and Recreation*
- *Curriculum was developed by a volunteer working with FS through partnership with UI-E*

- *Junior MTS program was initiated in spring of 2009, to introduce stewardship and trail building to volunteers who are junior high school age and younger*

- *Established an Adopt A Trail or Trailhead program forest-wide*

- *The volunteer program was strengthened by the Shawnee Volunteer Corps logo, incentive program, newsletter, banquet and information sessions.*

■ The Shawnee Volunteer Corps was formed in recognition of the growing volunteer service and as a strong ambassador of Caring for the Land and Serving the People. In the last three years the impact of the volunteer program has become a force for positive change. They include:

- *Trail clinic volunteers*

- *Adopt-a-trail program volunteers*

- *Alternative Spring Break – 2 groups (Fieldcrest Middle School and Troop One Boy Scout/Troop Ten Venture Scouts) formed a bucket brigade, cleaned, painted and placed new fire rings*

- *AmeriCorps – 10 member Oak Seven Team*

- *Wilderness monitoring volunteers*

- *The Sierra Club assisted in maintaining 4.5 miles of trail at Bell Smith Springs and clearing storm debris.*

■ Hosted a workshop for contractors to learn about contracting for the federal government with an emphasis on the Forest Service and the Shawnee National Forest.

■ Hosted a Stewardship Contracting Workshop for Shawnee and Hoosier National Forests' staff to learn more about creating and managing stewardship agreements. This included a field trip to Land Between the Lakes.



# Connecting Citizens to the Land

This year we constructed/reconstructed about 17.5 miles of trail and maintained about 266 miles of trail.

■ The Motor Vehicle Use Map for the Forest was published.



Master Trail Stewards group

■ There were about 93 environmental education programs across the Forest on topics that include fire prevention, conservation education, heritage, botany, forestry, fisheries, wetlands, ecosystem diversity, geology, non-native invasive species and outdoor safety. All ages participated in these programs.

- A total of about 13,541 volunteer hours were donated in FY09.
- Four MTS and two crew leaders graduated this year.
- NWTF provided \$20,000 for equipment to maintain habitat for wildlife species such as Henslow's sparrow.
- Alternative Spring Breakers from diverse groups helped with trails.
- The Murray Bluff Mule Riders and Backcountry Horsemen of Southern Illinois hauled over 25 tons of gravel totaling 110 mule-use days and also transported the AmeriCorps equipment into Lusk Creek Wilderness.

- The Pinnacle School Elk River Challenge contributed one week, 450 hours, on storm clean-up, trail maintenance, trail construction and wilderness gravel hauling.

- The Forest, in conjunction with the PBS, hosted a Passport in Time volunteer project to design and create a Trail of Tears landscape quilt.

- In partnership and with the assistance of Ducks Unlimited, work was done to engineer and design 20 small wetlands in the Big Muddy floodplain.

■ The Shawnee Trails Conservancy (STC) was instrumental in the Forest receiving a grant of \$128,000 from the state's Recreational Trails Program for trail improvements on three segments of the River-to-River trail. The STC developed the grant proposal and sought support from other trail advocacy organizations and members of the Illinois Congressional Delegation. They also worked with Illinois Equine Research and Promotion Board to obtain the required \$20,000 in nonfederal matching funds.

Working on trails



■ Participated in the Southern Illinois Cultural and Natural Symposium hosted by SIU Center for Delta Studies. Speakers and displays were focused on the natural environment between the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers and the diverse cultural legacy.



# Protecting Ecosystems Across Boundaries

■ Acquired three tracts of land totaling about 345 acres from The Nature Conservancy.

■ Completed 25 Cooperative Fire Agreements and responded to 20 mutual aid fire requests totaling 419 acres. We also:

- *Moved to the new Illinois Interagency Dispatch Center that also serves US-Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), National Park Service, Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR).*
- *Burned a total of 3,296 acres for hazardous fuel reduction*
- *Fought 33 wildfires totaling 303 acres*
- *Worked with IDNR to donate two surplus federal wildland fire trucks to local fire departments*
- *11 participants completed a 5-day Basic Firefighter Training held at the Golconda Job Corps Center.*
- *37 students attended the first Eastern Area Engine Academy held at John A. Logan College and Crab Orchard*

*National Wildlife Refuge.*

■ Issued a one-year Emergency Closure Order prohibiting public access and use of all Forest caves and mines that support protected bat populations in an effort to prevent the spread of White-nose syndrome.

■ Open Land Management – The Illinois Chapter of the National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf), Quail Unlimited (QU) and Quail Forever (QF) donated approximately \$31,000 toward our Openlands Challenge Cost Share project.

■ Received a total of \$3,267,000 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding for Forest projects with most to be completed by contracting with privately-owned businesses.

■ Road damage from an ice storm and major wind events qualified the Forest for Emergency Relief for Federally Owned Roads (ERFO) funding from the Federal Highway Administration to remove downed trees, repair slumps, replace culverts, remove siltation from ditches and repair road surfaces.

Kudzu infestation



Garlic mustard taking over open land.



## Non-Native Invasive Species (NNIS)

- Worked with the River-to-River Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA), the Sierra Club, the FWS, the Natural Resource Conservation Service and the IDNR in developing the “Weed Watch of Southern Illinois” program, recruited and trained over 40 volunteers.
- Early Detection/Rapid Response of water hyacinth and Parrot feather, NNIS plants at Dutchman Lake were pulled to prevent them from invading the lake.
- Sierra Club pulled over 50 pounds of non-native invasive species (NNIS) from Lusk Creek Wilderness and Lake Glendale and helped complete the NNIS inventory.
- Are in the process of producing a plan to control and eradicate selected NNIS, focusing on 23 natural areas totaling about 3,500 acres.
- Hosted the media and public on an educational field trip to demonstrate the impacts of NNIS on native plant communities.



# Walking the Talk for Sustainability

- Developed a program for youth based on the Reduce, Reuse and Recycle message. The program included a recycling relay which was educational and fun for all.

- Implemented the Green Rewards program whereby employees earn credit for efforts to reduce their environmental footprint

- The Forest "Recycle and Warm a Heart" coat drive resulted in more than 60 coats being collected.

- Acquired two flexible fuel vehicles and began using synthetic oil reducing our dependency on petroleum.

- Construction of the new Hidden Springs District Office in Vienna was completed. The building was built to meet specifications as a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design



New Hidden Springs LEED building

(L.E.E.D.) building based on the Green Building Rating System for high-performance sustainable buildings.

- Planted native plant pollinator garden at the Mississippi Bluffs Ranger Station and the Murphysboro Work Center to educate employees and the public on the importance of using native species.



Pollinator garden at Murphysboro Work Center

## Be an Employer of Choice

- The Forest and the UI-E co-hosted ten members of the AmeriCorps Oak Seven Team for seven weeks on the Forest. Their accomplishments included: construction of 1/2 mile of trail, hauling ten tons of sandstone, helping monitor and maintain about ten miles of trail in Lusk Creek Wilderness, clearing ice-storm debris and general clean-up.

- Formed the Shawnee Conservation Corps which consisted of five Vienna High School students who worked on trails in the Lusk Creek Wilderness.

- A Student Career Employment Program (SCEP) student was converted to a Career Conditional wildlife biologist.

- We hosted 6 SCEP and 27 STEP students who worked in wildlife biology, botany, fisheries, trails management and environment education programs.

- We had seven Youth Conservation Corps students working with trails, fisheries, wildlife and archeology.

- The Forest hired 28 temporary/seasonal employees in trails, fire, fisheries, wildlife, botany and recreation.



AmeriCorps tailgate safety session before starting the day's work



**NONDISCRIMINATION STATEMENT:**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, or marital or family status, (not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.)

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audio tape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at 202/720-2600 (voice and TDD).

To file a complaint of discrimination write USDA Director, Office of Civil Rights, Room 326-W, Whitten Building, 1400 Independence Avenue, Washington, DC 20250-9410 or call 202/720-5964 (voice or TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

## We wish to Thank...

Over the past two years we have experienced three major ice storms, extensive flooding and a severe windstorm. Individuals, groups and city, state and federal agencies from all over Illinois and other states have worked together to repair damage on the Forest and throughout southern Illinois.



Large group of volunteers



The Forest wants to thank all of the volunteers who have helped clear damage resulting from crippling weather events experienced in southern Illinois.



USDA Forest Service  
**Shawnee National Forest**  
50 Highway 145 South  
Harrisburg, IL 62946

